



National Tour 2024

TEACHERS' RESOURCES

WHALEBONE

BY JENS ALTHEIMER



Learning areas



General capabilities



Cross-curriculum priorities

Why WHALEBONE?

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancement, understanding the relationship between Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the intricate fabric of human stories and memories has never been more critical. Here's why WHALEBONE, a theatre show focusing on these themes, is particularly pressing and relevant for students today:

- **The Intersection of Humanity and Technology:** We stand at a unique crossroads where AI impacts almost every aspect of our daily lives—from the algorithms curating our social media feeds to the potential of AI in fields such as healthcare, transportation, and finance. Amidst this integration, there's a vital conversation about what it truly means to be human. A theatre show exploring this interaction challenges students to reflect on our evolving relationship with technology and the essence of human experience.
- **Understanding the Value of Human Narratives:** As AI becomes increasingly sophisticated, there's a growing concern that the nuances, emotions, and imperfections that make human stories rich and valuable could be overshadowed or misunderstood. By placing emphasis on the importance of human memories and stories, the show helps students appreciate the irreplaceable tapestry of human experience and the need to safeguard it.
- **Ethical Implications of AI:** AI is not just a technological phenomenon; it brings along a slew of ethical, moral, and societal considerations. Through the engaging medium of theatre, students are introduced to the moral dilemmas surrounding AI, prompting them to question its potential consequences and benefits.
- **Engaging Introduction to AI:** For many students, AI can seem like an abstract or intimidating concept. A theatre show provides a captivating and accessible entry point. By weaving AI themes into a narrative, students can relate to and understand complex topics in a more personal and emotional way. This makes the theatre an invaluable tool for educators to spark interest and drive conversations around AI.

The Whalebone show also underscores the pedagogic importance of sustainable and interdisciplinary thinking—a vital lesson for the students of today who will become the custodians of tomorrow's world.

- **Promoting Sustainable Thinking:** One of the most pressing challenges of our time is the need for sustainable living. The Whalebone show not only discusses but demonstrates the power of recycling and the innovative use of pre-used materials. By integrating these elements into its narrative, the show encourages students to envision a world where resourcefulness isn't just an afterthought but a primary consideration.
- **Interdisciplinary Learning:** The Whalebone show stands as a testament to the symbiotic relationship between art, science, and technology. In today's interconnected world, it's crucial for students to recognize that disciplines do not exist in silos.
The combination of these subjects fosters holistic learning, nurturing creativity, analytical skills, and a vision that is larger than the sum of its parts. Witnessing this fusion in a theatrical setting, students are motivated to think beyond conventional boundaries and to appreciate the myriad possibilities that arise when fields intersect.





- **Stimulating Visual Learning:** In an age of digital distractions, grabbing the attention of young minds can be challenging. The Whalebone show, through its vibrant projections, quirky inventions, and intricate machines, offers an immersive visual treat. This not only entertains but also reinforces the pedagogic messages in an engaging manner. The vivid visuals and surprising elements serve as memory anchors, ensuring that the themes of the show linger long after the curtain falls.
- **Nurturing Creativity:** By showcasing inventive machines and emphasizing the importance of sustainable building, the show inspires students to think creatively. In a world that often pushes for standardized solutions, it's these bursts of creativity, nurtured by such experiences, that lead to groundbreaking innovations.

A theatre show centering on AI, human stories, and memories not only mirrors the zeitgeist of our times but also provides an immersive educational experience. For teachers, it presents an innovative avenue to introduce students to the multifaceted world of AI, stirring both their intellect and emotions, and fostering a generation of thinkers who approach technology with both curiosity and caution.

Whalebone resonates with the pedagogic imperative of molding students who are not only informed but also inspired to take meaningful action. Through its captivating visuals and thought-provoking themes, it fosters an environment of creative learning and growth.



Multi-Angle Approach

The concept of WHALEBONE connects the Arts with Science and Technology. Stories and narratives meet inventions, machines, digital content, video animation and socially relevant questions about implications of present and future Artificial Intelligence.

Thus, the show and possible school activities extends into different areas of the curriculum.

Curriculum Specifications

Learning Areas

- The Arts (Drama)
- English (Listening and Understanding)
- Science
- Technologies and Designs

General Capacities

- Literacy
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Capability
- Critical and Creative thinking
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical understanding

Cross Curriculum Priorities

- Sustainability

ABOUT THE SHOW

Set within a place called the 'Depository', Whalebone follows a solitary worker as he tries to safeguard human stories, memories and emotions in a data-driven world where AI and machines are going rogue, and making more and more decisions for us.

Featuring dazzling video and computer animations, flying objects and a pinch of circus, this richly visual theatrical experience takes students on a roller-coaster ride filled with eccentric contraptions, strange machinery and clunky inventions, including the world's first half-human juggling machine!

Perfect for school years 1 –6, Whalebone will inspire the minds of young aspiring inventors, as well as everyone who loves stories, surprises and wonders, and leave audiences pondering what role technology plays in our lives and just what it is that makes us humans human.

ABOUT THE MAKER

Jens Altheimer is an award-winning independent artist who has been making and presenting work for audiences in Australia and Europe for 35 years. He is a director, performer, inventor, tinkerer, producer and mentor, with a strong interest in creating participatory and empowering art experiences. Jens incorporates elements of puppetry, interactive mechanical sculptures, video, circus and music into his highly visual theatre productions that explore human relationships through the world of animated objects.

His body of work includes family theatre, multidisciplinary community art projects, playful kinetic installations, and circus productions. Trained at Jacques Lecoq in Paris and collaborating with companies including Phillipe Genty Company, National Theatre Stuttgart (Germany), and the National Theatre Karlsruhe (Germany), Jens relocated to Australia in 2009.

His productions have received critical acclaim and have been presented at festivals and international tours such as Sydney Festival, The Garden of Unearthly Delights, LaMama Theatre, and festivals in New Zealand and Malta.

Jens won the Adelaide Fringe Award for 'Best Production for Children' in 2013 with 'Squaring the Wheel' and got nominated for the same award in 2017 with 'Loose Ends'

In 2023, he got nominated for the Green Room Awards, Best Costume and Set Design for 'Whalebone'.

CAST

Jens Altheimer

CREATIVE TEAM

Director // Jens Altheimer

Lighting Designer // Chris Bennett

Composer & Sound Designer // Dan West

Video Animations // Dave Jones

Set & Costume Designer // Jens Altheimer

Poster Design // Joel van Echteld

Stop motion and Videos // Jens Altheimer and Chris Bennett

Stop motion backgrounds // Joel van Echteld

Support to the text // Chris Thompson

GENRE

Visual Family Theatre / Children's Theatre

AGES

6-12 years and adults

DURATION

55 minutes, followed by a Q & A

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION

This production contains the use of dynamic and twitchy sounds, theatrical smoke, fast paced images and videos

For detailed information, please visit

www.jensaltheimer.com/whalebone

The company acknowledges the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, create and gather.

We pay our respects to all First Peoples, their Elders past and present, and their enduring connections to Country, knowledge and stories. We accept the invitation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and support a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Australian Constitution.



Activities

Pre-Show Activities

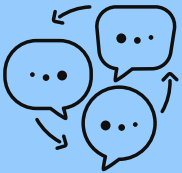
This pre-show resource will help you make informed predictions about what you'll see on stage, and start some conversation in the classroom.



- Watch the WHALEBONE show trailer
<https://youtu.be/MqRLKXjDdl8>. (1'40")
- Watch one of the videos about Artificial Intelligence.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQPC4_DsJ8I (1'15", year 1– 3)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbEbs6l3eLw> (4'38", gives a good overview for year 4–6)



- Read the interview with Jens (you can find it at the 'Materials' section at the end of the Teachers' Resources)
- Read Jens' Bio



- Make predictions what you will see on stage, based on the trailer, the interview and Jens' bio
- Discuss where everyone thinks that AI is part of their life
- What clues does the show tagline – can we save our stories when the robots arrive? – tell you about the two big themes of the show? Which words indicate that there may be some conflict?
- Discuss what is a tinkerer and an inventor and what the famous Thomas Edison quote mean:
 'I never failed once. It just happened to be a 2000 step process'
- Discuss what is a story teller and how are lives are full of imaginary and real stories

Post-Show Activities

The Post Show Activities are here to help you dive deeper after watching the onstage performance. They are filled with ideas for reflection, activities and shed light on the creative thoughts behind the production. . We hope this resource enables a more in depth reflection about the themes of the show and brings back some memorable theatre moments for you and your students!



- What were the visual elements in the show? Think of at least one example for machines, inventions, projections, set, costume, lighting, flying objects, special effects.
- Recall some moments from the show that resonated with you, made you tense or made you laugh. Think about how the acting, direction and design made you feel that way.
- Write a short story: Have students write a short story about a memory they have that is important to them. Encourage them to think about the details and sensory experiences of the memory, and how they could use storytelling techniques to make it come to life.

Link to Australian Curriculum: English Year 3-7: Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension.



- How would you describe the world of the show and what are the big ideas explored in the story?
- How did the show make you feel?
- How do you think A.I.s might affect the way we tell stories in the future?
- How do the inventions and contraptions in the show help to tell the story?
- What elements are used to create excitement and interest?
- How is the set of the show based on the idea of recycling?

Link to Australian Curriculum: English Year 3-7 : Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension.



- Research A.I.: Have students research A.I. technology and how it is being used in different industries. Encourage them to think about the benefits and drawbacks of A.I., and how it could affect storytelling in the future.

Link to Australian Curriculum: Digital Technologies Year 3-7: Investigate how digital systems represent text, image and audio data in binary.



- Create your own contraption: Have students design and create their own contraption that could be used in a theatrical production like "Whalebone". Encourage them to consider the purpose of their contraption and how it could enhance a storytelling experience.

Link to Australian Curriculum: Design and Technologies Year 3-7: Critique needs or opportunities for designing and explore and test a variety of materials, components, tools and equipment and the techniques needed to create designed solutions.



Materials

Interview with Jens Altheimer about the creation of WHALEBONE

What interests you most about creating work for young people?

I think kids (and their house- trained adults) should come to the theatre as a place of wonder.

Where they get surprised, puzzled, amused and blown away by things they would never seen before like that. Things that open a window to a world they haven't experienced (and expected) before. And when they look through that window, the stories they see should be exciting and encourage them to ignite their imagination, make up their own stories and relate them to their life.

So I take a huge pleasure in spending months and months to invent those narratives and contraptions that make this kind of magic happen.

Where did the idea behind Whalebone come from?

That was just about the time when I had gathered a bunch of old family objects and was remembering the stories in my brain connected to those memorabilia. And I had this thought: how would it be if there would be a place where those stories inside of the objects could actually be extracted and then saved somewhere. The idea of the mysterious 'Depository' (that exactly does this) was born.

A few days after I was getting directions on my phone and I suddenly remembered how different that had been a while ago, unfolding maps and working out the route. It suddenly made me think about how our decisions and tasks are more and more taken over by technology and the A.I.s hidden inside.

And what if these two universes would collide and have some conversation about stories, data, humanity and machines? The idea to 'Whalebone' was born. All the exciting visuals, actions and contraptions then appeared on the path, bringing together quirky machines, a half human juggling machine, a malicious computer virus, lots of clowning and heaps more.

Do you remember your first theatre experience?

Yep. It wasn't seeing a show, but making theatre. In early primary school, our class put on a nativity scene. And I scored the main role of Joseph!

I can't remember much of the artistic brilliance of the performance, but I always remember the one instruction from the director: walking from side to side of the stage next to Maria, I had to be on the inner side of her, towards the audience. If not nobody would have seen me: I was so much smaller than the girl who played Maria. I sometimes wonder if that early trauma not to be seen is the reason that I turned into the uncontested front man... of my solo performances.

What can you tell us about the technology used in the show

Don't get me started. No, wait...get me started! There are three computers, two projectors, three micro-processors, 4 remote control systems, 5 relays, two electro magnets, one vacuum cleaner, meters of wire, three hairdryers, a bunch of old telephones, two smoke machines, one air blower and lots of LEDs.

All the clunky old machines you see on stage have a wicked inner life: a bit like a wolf in sheep's clothing. And, so much can be said here: they do amazing and absolutely surprising things!

The author Arthur C. Clarke once said:

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

That's exactly what I want that the technology does in in Whalebone: create magic and wonder!

What's the best feedback you've received from a young audience member about Whalebone?

Hearing a 10 year old saying after the show: 'I wish I could be you!' filled me a bit with pride. Even though, poor boy, didn't know what he'd be in for!

But I will corrupt the question a bit and give you the best feedback I got from a 'young at heart' audience member, Mandy who is a grandmother and came with her grand daughter to watch the show:

"I wish your inventions could be made real and we could collect and save memories that we touch, live with, connect to and share them. I just want to say thank you for being you, so creative and generous and bringing to life an idea that I wish looked like and worked like you showed today in WHALEBONE. "

Company's contacts

A man with grey hair, wearing a black helmet and a green jacket, is blowing a large, translucent bubble with gum. He has a surprised expression on his face. Above his head is a large, bright pink balloon. Behind him is a shiny, metallic, ribbed object that looks like a party horn or a large, crinkled piece of foil. The background is a solid teal color.

For any questions regarding the upcoming show and teacher's resources, please don't hesitate to contact me

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TRAILER

<https://vimeo.com/665840490>